

URBAN

Latino



LATINA ISSUE

STREET GODDESS

A self-proclaimed "Around The Way Girl", **Jaslene Gonzalez**' humble journey from the block to international fame.

MAKING NOISE

Zulay Henao has a baby face and a genuine smile, but don't get it twisted, she knows how to use a rifle

TWO CULTURES! MARCHING TO ONE DRUM.

Culture Divide Amongst Latinos and Africans: But Why???

Also:

Valery Ortiz, Roberta Valderrama, Tyna O, Pitbull

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Damas y Caballeros...

I am proud to announce that this year's Latina Issue is hotter than ever before! We've got sexy mixed with classy mixed with strength mixed with prestige. As we always pay homage to those Latinas who paved the way for the Latinas making moves today, this year's Latina Issue is all about the next generation - the ladies that will carry on the legacy that the damas of the past have created. In 2006 we honored legendary Latinas like Miriam Colon and Shelley Morrison and in 2007 we are keeping up with the times. Today reality TV has become an American pastime and one show stands among the most highly watched, *Americas Next Top Model* with host and former supermodel Tyra Banks is followed by millions eager to see who will be crowned victorious next. It took eight seasons to see a full Latina rein supreme but the Puerto Rican community was there to celebrate. Jaslene Gonzalez [Street Goddess, pg. 40] was announced as the winner and both her hometown of Chicago and boricuas across the country were there to

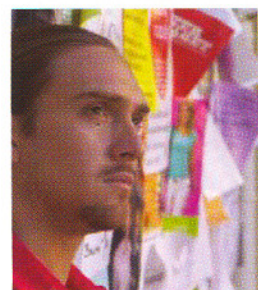
congratulate her top honor. Once just a shy salsa dancer from Chicago, Jaslene overcame countless obstacles on her way to her coveted title. The Covergirl sponsored cover photoshoot took place over two days and produced hundreds of beautiful images of Jaslene by photographer Josh Dehonney, which further proved why she won. Her natural beauty and down-to-earth appeal made for an easygoing production and the outcome is here for your eyes to enjoy! Check out our hot cover and 8-page feature (longer than any other publication) on *Americas Next Top Model* winner and our favorite homegirl, Jaslene Gonzalez. And for a behind-the-scenes look at our photoshoot check out Urban Latino on Myspace.

Keep flipping through the pages and you'll find the angel faced beauty that is Zulay Henao [Making Noise, pg. 34]. With a growing resume and a keen sense of self, Ms. Z brought her genuine personality to the pages of Urban Latino. She's beautiful, she's intelligent, she's strong and she's focused. What more can you ask for caballeros? From grooving seductively on the dance floor with Omarion to being the voiceless bombshell in the Franc. Reyes directed *Illegal Tender* to her military background, Zulay is a lady who knows what she wants and isn't afraid to go after it.

The strength in Latinas doesn't only grace these pages but is also the force behind the words. Writer Alicia Anabel contributes a social feature [Two Cultures Marching to the Same Drum, pg. 36] about the connection between Africans and Latinos and coins the term Afro Latina. Through interviews with some of the most influential Latinas in academia, art and music today, Anabel creates an educational article filled with historical accounts of the real connections between two cultures that are often at a divide. The crossroads of cultures is brought to life in Alicia's words and can be used to school children on a past not accounted for in their history books.

What would a Latina Issue be without a little eye candy? The sexy reggaeton superstar Pitbull tells us his top ten downloads and speaks about his upcoming album. And last but certainly not least we have the sultry Valery Ortiz as well as a profile on Roberta Valderrama. Are you ready yet? Well dive in and enjoy! For these are the ladies representando!
Ciao,

Zayda Rivera
Editor-In-Chief



In Memory of Patrik Boiling a great writer and musician.

I had the pleasure of working with Patrik during the early years of Urban Latino back when we were housed in Long Island City.

Sadly, in November of 2007 a drunk driver took his young life in his native country Sweden. Patrik will be missed.

Jorge Cano-Moreno, *Publisher*

8 The Culture, The Movement, The Magazine

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MISSION STATEMENT

The focus of Urban Latino is the Latino experience in this country, viewing all sides of our story. Our writers and contributors are individuals who have lived and experienced this diverse culture. Through their essays, columns, illustrations, and photos, we showcase the achievements of our community.

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10 Jay Street, Suite 205, Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-855-4872 • fax 718-855-8472 •
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Urban Latino Magazine, Inc. does not assume liability for services or beliefs advertised.

Subscription info:

10 issues U.S. \$16, 20 issues U.S. \$24

Make check payable to:
Urban Latino Magazine, Inc.
10 Jay Street, Suite 205, Brooklyn, NY 11201

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

subscriptions@urbanlatino.com

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ALICIA ANABEL

Author and Harlem resident Alicia Anabel is the visionary founder of the NYC Latina Writer's Workshop, the only organization of its kind in New York, boasting members of all ages, races, sexual orientations and writing disciplines. Having lent her talents to the *Latina Source* pod cast and penning her own *Finding Your Force* blog-- Anabel is a woman of many talents. She is currently busy completing a novel of historical fiction and being a mom to her brilliant 15-year-old daughter Courtiana.

Photo by aurora anaya-cerda.



JASON COLON

Jason Louis Colon was born and raised in Bed-Stuy Brooklyn, New York. Since 11 years of age he has been into graphic design. He began his freelance design in 2000, designing flyers and web sites for small businesses and parties, using tools such as Adobe Photoshop, illustrator, Dreamweaver and Flash. In 2003 Jason helped found and create an independent sneaker magazine, *Kicksclusive*. As the creative director of *Kicksclusive* he is responsible for everything visual from design to developing ideas for intriguing stories. Check out more of Jason's work at *Kicksclusive*.com. Jason is responsible for designing this issues cover story.



JOSH DEHONNEY

Currently, Josh is the photo editor of *Kicksclusive Magazine* - - the premier voice in sneaker culture - - and also as a freelance photo assistant. Josh's work shines through the photos in our cover story. To see more of his work, visit joshdehonney.com.



NATHALIE PEREZ

Currently in her last year of college, for graphic design, "Nathie" is the newest addition to our graphics department. Born in the Dominican Republic, raised in Holland, Nathie loves music, traveling, graphic design, fashion, and most importantly her family. "The best decision I made in my life, so far, has been to do my internship here in New York. I thank Urban Latino for this great opportunity. I've learned alot and it has definitely helped me to develop myself as a graphic designer. Progresar en esta vida es mi gran meta para triunfar." Thank you Nathie for being a unique addition to the Urban Latino Family.



DARIA WRIGHT

Born and raised in New Jersey, Daria Wright has been styling hair for over a decade. Her successful career as a hairstylist has included salon ownership in Montclair, New Jersey, as well as working alongside some of the industry's top hairstylists. Currently, she is a freelance hairstylist based in the New York City area and the hairstylist for this issues cover jaslene Gonzalez. Visit her website www.DariaWright.com for more news and info.

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TWO CULTURES MARCHING TO ONE DRUM

Culture Divide Amongst Latinos and Africans: But Why???

Words by: Alicia Anabel



Art by Yasmin Hernandez
www.yasminhernandez.com

Growing up, I wasn't light enough to be white, or dark enough to be black. Such is the case for many Latinos. While researching my novel, I uncovered significant events that shaped my identity. I learned that there is a struggle in our community with identity and self image. Is there a relationship at odds between Blacks and Latinos?

I knew it was time to address the issue when a black sister said to me, "How dare you want to write for a black magazine. It's not your place." It left me feeling like I needed to know my place. What began as historical research turned into a search of self discovery. This journey became a way to acknowledge and honor my Latin identity and a shared African culture.

I started to redefine who I am, and what I've found is that I cannot be Latina without recognizing that I'm black as well. I felt like "why do I have to prove to others that I'm black?" As an Afro Latina, my people are from Africa, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Panama. How much of who I am is influenced by my African ancestry and with this knowledge, where do I fit in this society?

I met with Dr. Georgina Falu, professor of Afro-Latino History and Culture at City College-CUNY and a self-described "Afro Puerto Riquena." As founder and president of the Falu Foundation, she is working on a heritage research program. "It's a mobilization that we've created in North America and the Caribbean to disseminate information that was never taught in school." Dr. Falu says that Afro Latinos are invisible, that "they themselves don't know they were Afro-Latino." She's quick with the stats. "We have over 150 million Afro descendants throughout Latino America, South America including Brazil." Colombia has 12 million blacks, Venezuela has 7 million, and Brazil has over 80 million.

Falu teaches children that there was already a culture and a time that Africans were not slaves and were free citizens of the continent of Africa, pointing out "they were teachers, scientists, artists, and outstanding writers. That has been wiped out of their memory. So when our children read history

and read about the blacks, the first blacks they see is the black man as a slave - as an ignorant people who could not write or read."

(As Dr. Natasha Gordon Chipembere, a professor at Medgar Evers College, explains it: "Essentially, if you came from an African origin, there's someone in your past who was enslaved in the Western hemisphere or in the Eastern hemisphere.")

Falu spoke of a play her foundation recently performed, called *What I Didn't Know of My African Heritage*. She transformed herself into a child before my eyes, excitedly describing how the children shared and

discussed history. The play was presented in Puerto Rico in a town called Loiza, hometown to reggaeton artist Tego Calderon and a place that still has a huge African presence.

I asked Dr. Falu what spurs the conflict in the U.S. between Afro-Latino and Black Americans. "African Americans would distrust you because they probably think you don't want to be black, and they are right. Most Afro-Latinos don't identify with being Afro-Latino." To get to some sort of understanding--or to meet halfway--Dr. Falu says, "I tell them you have to be patient. It took 40 to 50 years for you to say 'black is beautiful,' so you have to give a chance for the Latinos who are African descendants to read, to hear, to learn, and then go through a transition."

Marta Moreno Vega, founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, talked to me about our traditions. "They are very much alive and influencing the culture. Que es 'mangu'? It's an African dish. *Mondongo, mofongo*--all African words. Dancing *palo, merengue, bomba y plena*--all of it has its African roots." The author of *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santeria* and *When the Spirits Dance Mambo*, Dr. Vega notes that we share common religious practices: "*Gaga, lo Misterio* practiced in Santo Domingo, the Yoruba religions, what they call Santeria, which is really *la regla de ocha, candomble* and *chango* traditions. These are all African retentions that have survived and continue to manifest." For those who deny their African roots, her response is: "you have no choice look in the mirror, you're black. If you cook our food, and carry your parents and grandparent's traditions, those of your forbears -Those are black traditions."

In her classes, Vega teaches her students to see their African descent and their religions and see how they have manifested in different places. "I want to take them away from being marginal or stigmatized as evil or negative religions, i.e. voodoo and *Misterio*." She wants to move them away from being something to be frightened of. She talks about how racism plays out in the process and how over 400 years of enslavement has

"WE HAVE OVER 150 MILLION AFRO DESCENDANTS THROUGHOUT LATINO AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA INCLUDING BRAZIL."
- DR. GEORGINA FALU

Total population	
Sub Saharan African	
150,000,000 Latin Americans	
<small>*Figure excludes Belize, Guyana, Suriname, or non-Romance-speaking areas of the Caribbean</small>	
Regions with significant populations	
 Brazil	76.8 million
 Colombia	11 million
 Dominican Republic	3.2 million
 Haiti	8.5 million
 Cuba	3.9 million
 Venezuela	3.1 million
 Peru	1.1 million
 Nicaragua	510,000
 Ecuador	912,000
 Panama	4,000,000
 Puerto Rico	715,000
 Guatemala	254,000
 Uruguay	192,000
 Honduras	500,000
 Paraguay	262,000
 Costa Rica	444,000
 Mexico	1,000,000
 El Salvador	N/A

destroyed a culture. "How do you destroy culture? By having people hate themselves. People have been taught your things are not valuable, your color is not valuable, your being is not valuable. Of course there's self hatred. One needs to put out there that our traditions are beautiful, that our traditions are valuable."

BEING A BLACK LATINA GOING HOME

Dr. Natasha Gordon Chipembere's response when asked how she would define herself was that she sees herself, "As a woman, as a black woman, as an African, but if I had to check a little box - - I would call myself Afro Caribbean." She took me through her family history, "my father's from Panama and my mother is from Costa Rica when I go back 1 or 2 generations on both sides my grandparents are from Jamaica. Although my parents speak Spanish my upbringing was very Caribbean."

For Gordon, self identity comes down to the questions: What language do you speak? What language do you claim? "Students I teach are 95% immigrants, so when they come here it's the idea of getting rid of the accents." She wants her students to understand that whether they speak Creole, *patua*, or are considered ESL (English as a Second Language) is not necessarily a negative thing.

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- DR. MARTA MORENO VEGA

"Obviously, being categorized in a system is negative-- particularly when it forces you to give up your identity or feel ashamed of your identity and not claim it." Reminding us that "if you can speak different languages in different situations, that's power. That being Latino essentially means you come from a place that speaks Spanish - - that's the difference between being a Dominican and being a Haitian. It's the language. Language is the passing on of culture - - cultural values."

Gordon recalled the first time she noticed she was different. "I was very brown, at 5 years old, and was walking with my mom on a bridge and these two men yelled 'Move out of the way, nigger,' and the two men pushed me into the street. That was the moment when I understood that I was a black girl and that I was different." She talked about being a junior in college and wanting to study abroad. "I was at the top of

my class and was denied the opportunity to study abroad." She went back to her dorm sobbing, and a friend told her to close her eyes and put her finger on a map. When she opened her eyes she had picked Kenya. Her first visit to Africa 16 years ago transformed her life. "I understood myself. I never felt more at home. People thought I looked like them...It was the first place where I walked around. I claimed that. I understood that Africa was my home."

LOST IN THE SEA OF OTHERNESS

From my experience, one country that suffers from denial of its blackness is the Dominican Republic. We are quick to correct anyone who calls us black, claiming that we're *Indio*. The blackest one of us will swear she's white. On the search for her own cultural identity, artist Yasmin Hernandez uses art as part of her process of self discovery. "Each figure depicted in my portraits—whether a freedom fighter, a spiritual deity, or my mom—is disenfranchised and battles to rise above," she explains.

Hernandez portrays her subjects as warriors, goddesses, and gods. "My palette is usually inspired by the color as-

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sociations of the pantheon of Yoruba deities whose influence is felt throughout the African Diaspora.” She identifies herself as Puerto Rican but says, “If folks are forcing me to associate with a particular race, then I would be more inclined to identify as African. What’s most important is that I identify with my indigenous history without negating my Spanish ancestry.”

Coming from East New York, Brooklyn, where the kids were either African American or Puerto Rican, Hernandez recalls, “I didn’t see myself being lost in the sea of otherness. I wasn’t the other; everything else was other.” Was there ever a moment where she denied her blackness? “When I was a little girl, I would rub lotion on my body--*Mira mami, soy blanca!* and I would do this when I was five. So little of that has to do with me – it really had to do with the environment that

CONNECTING THROUGH MUSIC

While writing this story, I kept hearing my father’s voice... “Remember where you come from,” he winked as he played the *tambora*. Music plays a big part of our shared history with Africa. It’s time to get back to our roots. I sat with Tato Torres, composer and lead singer of musical group, Yerbabuena. He says, “I’ve gotten people lighter than me question, ‘Why are you singing Afro Puerto Rican music? You’re not Afro Puerto Rican!’ as if I do not have the right to claim my Afro Puerto Rican roots. And I’ve gotten the total other extreme, where people darker than me tell me ‘Man, you black!’”

“We started out as a group very focused on Afro Puerto Rican music,” Torres says. “Then we moved it to PR roots music.

brings us together, “It’s a way to preserve and remember where we come from. It brings the family home. It brings the community to the table. I’ve seen grandmothers, mothers and daughters – whole families – come to see us – it’s not just ours – that’s not just my shit, that’s my moms shit and my grandpas shit – that’s my kids shit!” The intensity and response to his music, “where we play, how we play, is all very important – you’re supposed to come out of there feeling more connected to the people that were right next to you, more connected to the people that weren’t even there, and more connected to people that are not even alive – that’s really what it’s about – that’s why I say its preserving identity.”

So how do we honor Africa and still hold onto our Latin roots? Do we have to pick one? Dr. Falu, Dr. Vega, Dr. Gordon,

“WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I WOULD RUB LOTION ON MY BODY--MIRA MAMI, SOY BLANCA! AND I WOULD DO THIS WHEN I WAS FIVE. SO LITTLE OF THAT HAS TO DO WITH ME - IT REALLY HAD TO DO WITH THE ENVIRONMENT THAT SURROUNDS YOU - AND RECOGNIZING THAT THERE’S THIS PRIVILEGE THAT IS GIVEN TO PEOPLE WHO ARE LIGHTER.”

- YASMIN HERNANDEZ

surrounds you – and recognizing that there’s this privilege that is given to people who are lighter.”

Invited to participate in an artist collective called “Blacker than Thou,” Hernandez says “I was forced to confront that issue in my head. ‘I’m the only Puerto Rican and I’m the lightest complexion participating.’ I realized that blackness is a political state.” For her now it’s about claiming a culture. “Black people in the world are the people who are most oppressed – just on the basis of the color of their skin. You cannot be black and not exist with this politicized state and it’s not a choice – its not that you choose to put yourself there it’s that the dynamic of the powers that be already categorize you as such.”

Everything we do has that strong African element to it.” Torres plays *bomba y plena*, a genre of Puerto Rican drum music and chanting. “The call and response singing is a very specific dialogue between dancers and dancers challenging drummers. The roots of Bomba are definitely African – but it’s still ours – because it’s our interpretation of these elements.”

Music bridges those communities that are marginalized, “you need your own entertainment most of the time. You need entertainment that really touches your soul – that’s why hip hop was created – because people needed to feel connected to one another.” Tato says that he creates this music because it

Yasmin and Tato all agree that the answer is education. Know your history. Know where you’re from. Claim yourself and accept yourself and always maintain that there is value in Latino culture. We add something very special to the mix.

Yasmin adds, “The Diaspora is something bounded by blood and by spirit, and tradition and legacy—not borders. What unites us is the Atlantic Ocean. You go to Ghana, and you’re gonna find a slave castle on the coast. If you cross the Atlantic and you go to San Juan, Cartagena or Havana or Santo Domingo, you’re gonna find the same castles. Our place is this huge Diaspora. Our people are everywhere – every place is our place.” **ULM**